

PAUL'S HOPE IN THE RESURRECTION

Acts 24:1-27

Key Verse: 24:15

“... and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”

Today's passage is about Paul's trial before the Roman governor Felix. His accusers brought many charges against him that were false and vague. Paul had a very strong defense based on facts. However, he did not stop at defending himself. He used the opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ. He shared his hope in resurrection. He also helped Felix to repent his sins through their private Bible study sessions. May the Lord help us to share our hope in resurrection whenever we have opportunity!

I. PAUL STANDS TRIAL BEFORE FELIX (1-13)

Look at verse 1. *Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor.* The Roman commander suspended Paul's trial in Jerusalem when Sadducees and Pharisees started a violent dispute and his life was in danger. Then the commander learned that the Jews formed a 40 men death squad to kill Paul in an ambush. So he decided to send Paul to Caesarea where the Roman headquarters of the region was located. A detachment of 470 Roman soldiers escorted Paul to Caesarea where he was placed in a protective custody in Herod's palace. Five days later, his trial before Felix began.

For the trial, a team of Jewish elders led by the high priest Ananias came to Caesarea to bring their charges against Paul. Ananias was an octogenarian but he hated Paul so much that he made the 65 mile trip. He hired a high-priced international lawyer named Tertullus for the trial. Most likely Tertullus was well acquainted with the legal procedures of the Roman court and fluent in the Latin language. Before presenting his case, Tertullus flattered Felix, praising his “foresight to bring reforms in the nation,” even though he was not a good governor by any standard. What were the charges against Paul? The lawyer brought three charges. First, he accused Paul to be “a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world” (5). Second, he charged Paul to be “a ringleader of the Nazarene sect.” Third, he accused that Paul tried to desecrate the temple (6). The other Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true (9).

The first and the third charges were categorically false. It was true that riots often followed Paul in many cities, but Paul did not incite them, not even one. The riots were stirred up by the Jews. And Paul did not desecrate the temple. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, Felix had a letter in his hand from his commander in Jerusalem, contradicting the charges. In the letter, Claudius Lysias reported that he found no charge against Paul that deserved death or imprisonment (23:39). The charges were

false, with no factual basis. But Tertullus was a seasoned lawyer. He knew which button to press. He knew that the Roman governor could not ignore any charges related to crowd control. Several Roman governors were fired by the Emperor because of Jewish riots. The lawyer knew that any hint of public disturbance would get the governor's attention.

How did Paul defend himself before the Roman court? He had no attorney with him, not even a public defender. He was alone. But he was not intimidated, because he knew that the Lord was with him. Paul began by acknowledging Felix. He said, "I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense" (11). This was not a flatter. Felix had been the Roman governor in Judea for several years. Paul was saying, "I know that you are not a rookie judge. You know the Jewish society very well. So I am comfortable with defending myself before you." Then he said, "You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me" (11-13). Fact by fact, Paul dismantled the charges against him. He said that he had arrived in Jerusalem only 12 days ago. "How could you plan and execute a public event involving thousands of people in a matter of days? Where are the witnesses? No one saw me inciting a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. They cannot prove to you the charges because these things never happened. The fact is that I did not even argue with anyone at the temple, let alone cause a public disturbance!" Paul's testimony was strong because it was based on facts. But he had more to say.

II. HOPE IN THE RESURRECTION (14-23)

Look at verses 14-16. *However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.* From a criminal defense standpoint, this statement was unnecessary and even dangerous. If Paul wanted to get his case dismissed for lack of evidence, his earlier statement would have been sufficient. But he added a self-incriminating statement. Why? We learn that Paul was not standing before the governor only to defend himself. He used the opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us think about his statement in detail.

First, Jesus is the Way. Paul said, "However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way." He declared that he worshiped God as a disciple of Jesus. In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." What does it Jesus is the way? Jesus is the only way to heaven. In our pluralistic society, people cringe at our belief that Jesus is the only way. They would call us narrow-minded bigots. But Jesus is not a way to heaven. He is the way. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus. It is because Jesus is the only

one who gave his life on the cross to take away our sins. He is the only one who rose from the dead to open the door to the kingdom of God. Only Jesus can set us free from the bondage of sin and death through his cross and resurrection. Our direction in life is fundamentally changed when we accept Jesus into our life. We know the way. We know where we are headed. We don't have to wander around. We begin our race toward the finish line with our eyes fixed on Jesus. Paul testified that he was a follower of the Way.

Second, hope in resurrection. Paul said, "I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets ..." The Jews accused Paul of abandoning his Jewish heritage. It is true that Paul obeyed Jesus' command to be a light to the Gentiles. It is also true that he proclaimed salvation by faith in Jesus alone. He taught the Gentiles that they did not need to be circumcised to receive the grace of salvation. But he was not against the Law and the Prophets. He loved his Jewish roots. He believed and taught the Law and the Prophets—the Old Testament Scriptures. He loved his Jewish brothers and sisters. He was willing to give his life for them. He said, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel" (Ro 9:2-3).

Most importantly, Paul said in verse 15, "I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked." He had said earlier before the Sanhedrin, "I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead" (23:6). Now he said he had the same hope in God as the Jewish leaders, and that hope was a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. In saying this, I think Paul was encouraging, rebuking and warning the Jewish leaders—all at the same time. Some of the Sanhedrin members were Sadducees who did not believe in resurrection. Paul was rebuking and encouraging them to come to their senses and have a hope in resurrection. He also said resurrection is for both the righteous and the wicked. This is true. Both those who are saved by the blood of Jesus (the righteous) and those who reject Jesus (the wicked) will be raised from the dead. Jesus said in John 5:28-29: "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned." This is a warning that everyone must heed.

Third, striving to keep conscience clear before God. Paul said, "So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man." Once again, Paul talked about his clear conscience before God. In his opening statement before the Sanhedrin, he had said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day" (23:1). This made the high priest furious and Paul was struck in his mouth before of it. So why did Paul keep on bringing up clear conscience? One problem of the Jewish leaders that really angered Jesus was their hypocrisy. They looked religious on the outside and were corrupt on the inside. They were like whitewashed tombs, looking pure on the outside but full of bones inside.

A deacon was proud and self-righteous. He wanted to impress some young people in his church about his religious standing. He asked them a question, “Why do people call me a Christian?” He was hoping they would praise him. After a moment’s pause, however, one young man replied, “Maybe it’s because they don’t know you.” Hypocrisy is something we all must guard against. It is our sinful nature to look good before people. But in the end what matters is who we are before God. Our faith must be real. Our obedience must be genuine. God knows those who really trust him and those who pretend. As Paul did, we must always strive to keep our conscience clear before God and man.

What else did Paul say to the governor? Again, he refuted the charges against him point by point. He said that one of the reasons why he returned to Jerusalem after several years’ absence was to bring relief offerings for the poor (17). He was ceremonially clean when they found him in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with him, nor was he involved in any disturbance (18). The charge against him about causing disturbance was totally without merit. The fact was that there were some Jews from the province of Asia there. They were eyewitnesses who should have been in the court, testifying to confirm the facts. The Jewish leaders who were present could only bring charges against him about what he said before the Sanhedrin (20). Even there, he had not done anything illegal. Then Paul again added a statement. Look at verse 21. “... *unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’*” Just in case Felix and other people missed his earlier testimony about his hope in resurrection, he repeated it. Paul was a preacher of the gospel, first for the Jews, then for the Gentiles.

Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes,” he said, “I will decide your case.” He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs (22-23). Felix knew that Christians would not go around causing riots. He knew Paul was innocent. Yet, he did not release Paul. He did not see any personal gain from doing so. He didn’t want to anger the Jews. From a spiritual standpoint, however, God was working quietly to lead his servant Paul to Rome.

III. PAUL’S MESSAGE TO FELIX (24-27)

Look at verse 24. *Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus.* What motivated Felix and his wife to want to listen to Paul? Perhaps they were curious about why Paul’s preaching had such deep impact on people everywhere. More likely they were interested in something else. Verse 26 says Felix was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. How about his wife Drusilla (a daughter of Herod Agrippa I)? Neither was she a spiritual woman. She was shopping in Pompeii with her son when Mt. Vesuvius erupted in AD 79. They perished there. Nevertheless, Paul used the opportunity to speak about his faith in Jesus Christ.

What did Paul teach Felix when he had Bible study sessions with him? Look at verse 25. *As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."* Paul's future was in the Roman governor's hand. But Paul did not talk about things that would please Felix. Instead, he talked about righteousness, telling him to repent his sins and accept Jesus as his Savior in order to have a right relationship with God. He talked about self-control. Felix was into money. He was after bribes. He had no self-control. Paul also talked about the judgment to come. This made Felix afraid. He said to Paul: "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."

In his mercy, God blessed Felix to study the Bible with a great Bible teacher. He gave him an opportunity to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus. But he said, "When I find it convenient, I will send for you." He postponed the most important decision of his life. He was afraid because he knew that he was not ready for the judgment. But he did not act on the word of God he heard. He left his fear hanging in the air.

On October 8, 1871, a great fire broke out in Chicago that killed about 300 people. Just before the fire, D.L. Moody preached the gospel at the Sunday evening service. He told his congregation to think about their personal relationship with Christ, asking them to come back the following week with a decision of faith. He wanted them to take time to think about the important decision. He did not want to pressure them. However, many of them died during the fire. From then on, Moody never told his audience to take a week to think about their salvation. No one should put off such important decision until a convenient time. The Bible says, "I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2Co 6:2). Hebrews 3:15 says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion" (ESV).

What did Felix decide to do with his prisoner Paul? He was a corrupt politician. Justice was not his concern. He kept Paul in prison for two years, hoping to get some bribes. He also wanted to grant a favor to the Jews (27). It was a win-win situation for him. But Paul suffered in prison for two more years.

In today's passage, we learned what Paul said as he stood trial before the Roman governor. He defended himself with facts. More importantly, he shared his hope in resurrection. May the Lord help each of us to share our hope in resurrection, whenever and wherever we are given an opportunity, as the Bible says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1Pe 3:15).